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Scottish Bird News

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE SOC

No 77 Sept. 2005

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Evening light at Loch na Keal.
(Janet Crummy)

Janet Crummy (Vice President) writes to describe the above scene – one of many memories during an SOC weekend by minibuses to Mull with Highland Branch.

It was the Saturday evening – we had an early dinner and decided to head out along Loch na Keal, looking for otters... very calm, with a glorious sunset.

We parked about halfway along, just below Ben More. I walked down from the roadside with the camera, watching the seaweeds in the pools, the reflections of Ben More and of course the sun setting. Others were wandering among the rocks, taking in the views. It was a magical scene with Carol silhouetted against the sky...

Sometimes you have these special experiences – spectacular backdrop, no wind or midges, good company and a great feeling of well-being. On the way back to Glenforsa, as we approached the woods in the dusk, a Woodcock circled his territory and a Cuckoo flew across in front of us. Then in a small clearing at the side of the road, ten fallow deer were quietly feeding – we had seen roe and red deer earlier in the day, but this was a rare sighting. It was certainly an evening I won't forget.

And on the famous Sea Eagles... At Loch Fris, we followed the Forestry Commission warden along a dirt track to the viewing hide. There in the trees ahead was a nest with the female sitting and the male in a nearby tree. Wonderful... he flew off lazily over the loch and along the other side till he disappeared over a hill, his white tail shining in the sunlight and those amazing huge wings... We were rewarded with superb views of the female stretching, then flying off to the top of a fairly close pine tree, preening, turning around and flying back to the nest. She then fed the chicks – the first had hatched only four days before... And again at Loch na Keal, going round under the cliffs to look for Golden Eagles, we were rewarded with a single bird being mobbed by two Ravens on the top of the steep rise. We stopped for quite a long time to watch this display, with the eagle being mobbed most of the time but just occasionally, the ravens being chased away. Further round the cliffs, we could see the Treshnish Isles, Staffa and Iona with the monastery shining in the sun...

...the unique coloured houses at Tobermory...that otter at Loch Don... Wonderful moments in a great weekend !

Janet Crummy

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Outgoing thoughts from the President

(Jimmy Maxwell)

At the beginning of August I had the good fortune to spend a few days in a Sutherland Glen. It was clear that it was the end of the breeding season with just one pair of waders left, a late brood of three Oystercatchers. Whinchats had left and I found just two family parties of Wheatears. Sand and House Martins though, still had large young in their nests and I found four Spotted Flycatcher families in 5km of the strath. It seemed just a few weeks since these birds arrived on breeding grounds and soon they would be gone. Observations such as these reminded me that my time as President also draws to a close as I step down at the AGM in October, having served on Council for five years, four of which as an officer and trustee. As I mentioned in the letter sent with the last mailing, a lot has happened in this time and I leave with the SOC settled in our new home, ready to embark on an exciting new future. Janet Crummy, as your new President, will oversee further changes and as ever, you will be fully informed through the pages of *SBN*. I wish her well in her new role.

I am not retiring in other ways however. I will continue as Chairman of the Lothian SOC Discussion Group, a post I have held since 1991, and this will keep up my involvement in organising and reporting on local survey work and conservation issues. A similar group was recently set up and is proving successful in the Borders and I would encourage other areas to consider meeting up in this informal manner. It is a great way to socialise with other birdwatchers in your area and adds another dimension to traditional branch meetings. It is a formula that would also work in those parts of Scotland without a branch of the SOC, as long as there are a few (at least three) members active in an area. Members in Moray may be organising such a group on the back of the existing group organising the new North East Scotland Atlas in that area.

I will also continue as SOC representative on two other groups: the BTO/SOC/Birdwatch Ireland Atlas Working Group, planning and co-ordinating the next distribution and abundance atlas of Britain and Ireland (see *SBN* 75:12); and the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group. It is our involvement in the latter that enabled SOC to publish the new Scottish Raptor Monitoring Report, which all members received in the last mailing. This new report replaces the Raptor Round Up we published previously and over the coming years it is expected that this publication will develop further as more information becomes available from all the partners in the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme. We are grateful to Scottish Natural Heritage for grant-aiding the publication of this report.

Back in Sutherland in August I was treated to the sight of four ring-tail Hen Harriers together, probably a female and family, and I also saw a male twice during my stay. The Hen Harrier is one of the most threatened species of breeding bird in Scotland at the moment and all the scientific evidence points to continued illegal persecution of adults and nests on grouse moors in the south and east of Scotland as being one of the causes of this dire position. Further scientific investigation into the ecology of Hen Harriers by the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group in the future will help assist conservationists protect this special bird. Some of our members will have been treated to seeing Hen Harriers at Muirshiel in the Clyde area this summer - another collaboration involving the SOC with both RSPB Scotland and SNH. (see article)

I believe that partnerships with other like-minded bodies is the way forward for the club: this means SOC with other Scottish and UK organisations, but also it means partnerships within the SOC, members and branches working together to pursue our common objectives. At our HQ, staff are working on these ideas, using our superb showpiece Waterston House as a catalyst to building new relationships.

This summer I was asked by someone what was special about SOC, what was our niche in the crowded world of bird and nature organisations and publications? I have given this much thought over the years, and I have come to the conclusion that, unlike any other group, SOC speaks for all birdwatchers in Scotland. By that I mean that our focus is on people, enabling those interested in birds and birdwatching in Scotland to come together and stand up for our hobby. Others provide bird reserves, or work for the conservation of species. Others organise surveys of birds and help those who study them in depth. There are magazines for casual birdwatchers and for serious birders, and journals for scientists. SOC is recognised as being the place to come to for knowledge about Scotland's birds and as being a group where an individual new to an area, or new to birdwatching, can come and meet others with a similar interest.

As I step down from office, I do hope that each one of you will help fulfil the charitable aims of the SOC by welcoming those people and sharing your knowledge with others. I leave, still proud of the club and what it has achieved over its long history, almost 70 years. I would like to thank everyone who has helped me during my time in office. Here's to another 70 years of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club!

Mark Holling (President).
(mark.holling@btinternet.com)

Young Oystercatchers *(Harry Scott)*

Scottish Bird News No 77 September 2005

Edited by
Jimmy Maxwell
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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 31st October 2005 to:

SBN Editor, SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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NEWS & NOTICES

New SOC members

We welcome the following new members to the Club: **Borders** Mr & Mrs R A Handyside. **Clyde** S & L Bowie, Dr D McCullough. **England Wales & NI** Mr & Mrs A Ferguson, Mr N J Truby. **Fife** Mr J Cobb. **Grampian** Mr J G Bailey. **Highland** Mr & Mrs J MacDonald. **Lothian** Mr P Ball, Mr & Mrs M C Barrie, S Herd & A Hutton. **Scotland – No branch** Dr D H James

2005 SOC Annual Conference

This year's Annual Conference, entitled 'Birds across the Continents' will be held on 28–30 October at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore.

The talks will cover both hemispheres and, in particular, the Antarctic, South America, Europe and Asia. There will also be two talks by members of the African Bird Club and a talk on the genetics of migration and climate change. Whether you are planning a trip or simply prefer to observe from the comfort of a chair, there will be plenty of superb slides and interesting accounts.

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are – **May** 1st £30: Mrs.H.Merrie 2nd £20: Mrs.P.Young 3rd £10: Brian Smith. **June** 1st £30: I. Darling 2nd £20: Mr. and Mrs. Hogg 3rd £10: Mrs.A.Park. **July** 1st £30: Dr. J. Stewart £20: Henry Robb 3rd £10: Mrs.A.Park

New members are always welcome. Please contact Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.

Scottish Bird Report changes

Ray Murray, editor of *Scottish Bird Report* since the 1990 edition, is currently working on the 2002 Report. He apologises for the late delivery of this Report, but of course has also been fully involved with the new *Birds of Scotland* book, to be published by SOC in 2007. Those writing sections of this book have indicated how useful our back copies of *Scottish Bird Reports* have been, but the future of *SBR* may be in doubt. Ray, while hoping still to be involved in the work, has indicated that he wishes to relinquish the Editor's role once the 2002 edition is published. Council have been considering how best to provide this kind of information in the future. A revamped, more accessible annual report might be an option. If you are interested in documenting Scotland's changing birdlife, please get in touch with HQ to discuss your ideas and perhaps volunteer some time to help in this vital work.

Wildlife art exhibition - Art on the Wing 2005

16th October–12th November 2005 in Maclaurin Art Galleries, Rozelle Park, Ayr

The RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group is organising a wildlife art exhibition as detailed above. This is part of the Ayr 800 activities, as the town celebrates 800 years since it became a Royal Burgh. King William 1 signed the Royal Charter in Lanark in May 1205.

The Art Exhibition will include work from professional wildlife artists from Scotland, England and Sri Lanka, and will incorporate two dimensional work in oils, water colours and pencil, and three dimensional work, incorporating sculpture, ceramics, wood and basketwork, as well as jewellery.

All profits from the sale of artwork will be donated to RSPB Scotland's conservation programme. The Local Group acknowledge the help given by South Ayrshire Council and The Maclaurin Trust.

We would especially like to thank our sponsors – Hope Homes Scotland Ltd.

The following is a list of artists who are taking part in the exhibition. Christopher Allan, Lise Bech, Reuben Paul Bethey, Keith Brockie, John Busby, Keith & Beryl Dawdry, Claire Harkess, Peter Howson, Alan Lees, Aidan Maccormick, Susan Montgomery, William Neill, Lester Perera, Darren Rees, Pascale Rentsch, Derek Robertson, Chris Rose, Fiona Russell, Dafila Scott, Glen Scouller, Andrew Stevenson, Thelma Sykes, John Threlfall, Anna de Ville, Mike Warren, Donald Watson, Duncan Watt, Elizabeth Waugh, Jim Whitworth, Darren Woodhead, Winifred Wright.

Publication preview on Eddie Balfour

Orkney Field Club is about to produce a book about the naturalist Eddie Balfour and his research work with Hen Harriers. The foreword, by Eric Meek, Orkney Area Manager for RSPB Scotland, gives us an idea of the content –

Arriving in Orkney to work for the RSPB in January 1981, a few years after Eddie Balfour died, meant that I never had the chance to meet him. However, I felt as though I had. As I began to tramp the Orkney moors in search of breeding Hen Harriers and Merlins, it felt as though I was following in his footsteps, footsteps with which I had become familiar long before the thought of coming to work in the islands ever entered my head.

For Eddie's work on these magical birds of prey had become legendary and familiar to anyone with an interest in ornithology through the series of papers he wrote in the RSPB's journal *Bird Notes*. Without even leaving one's armchair or desk, it had been possible for many an aspiring raptor enthusiast to bask in Eddie's enthusiasm for his native islands and the Harriers that he had made his own. Such familiarity with Eddie's work was not confined to Britain.

As I began to travel the world a little more widely and mention to like-minded folk that I now lived and worked in Orkney, I was amazed at how often the response was: ' wow! where that guy Balfour did all that great work on Hen Harriers, the longest running raptor study in the world!'.

Eddie's groundwork over a period of more than thirty years formed the sound base on which further studies of Orkney's Harriers were based. Olaf Cuthbert has related how, after Eddie's death, Nick Picozzi of the Institute of Terrestial Ecology (now the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology) continued detailed studies for the six years up to 1981. Thereafter I, and other RSPB staff, continued to monitor the population in a necessarily less intensive way, attempting to find all the successful nests.

During the 1990s it became apparent that the Harriers were declining markedly and the need for more detail studies was obvious. This was done as a Ph.D project by Arjun Amar, again of CEH, jointly funded by that organisation, Aberdeen University and RSPB. This study showed clearly that our Harriers were short of food, especially in the early part of the breeding season and has led directly to the introduction of the Scottish Natural Heritage Hen Harrier Scheme, whereby farmers are funded to manage part of their land primarily to increase the availability of prey.

None of this would have been possible without the superb initial work carried out by Eddie. His papers have been scrutinised again and again and more and more information extracted from them, all of it essential to the understanding and conservation of this charismatic bird. The name Eddie Balfour and that of the Hen Harrier have become synonymous and are destined to remain so.

The publicity launch of the book is on 1st September 2005.

The Clackmannanshire Breeding Bird Atlas - an update

Clackmannanshire Ornithological Atlas Group

Work on the atlas continued apace during 2004. In the field, 49 new KM squares or part squares were allocated and returned. The number of squares now completed, or almost completed, stands at 135. (we had planned to have 120 completed at this stage) Seven further squares have been allocated for which no returns have been received as yet. This leaves 55 yet to be allocated during the programmed two years left for survey work. Thirty-four of these have already been taken up for the 2005 season. Supplementary records have also been collected for quite a number of squares, both allocated and none allocated.

Twenty-three surveyors spent 338.7 recorded hours in the field during 2004 making a total of 965.4 hours by 30 surveyors in the three years to date (this excludes time spent travelling to and from the square). Not all hours expended have been recorded - e.g. by those surveyors living in the square they were surveying or by surveyors submitting supplementary records. Many hours were also spent by the steering group members on administrative tasks during this and previous years.

Some highlights of the 2004 season were a colony of Common Gulls discovered breeding on a demolition site in Alloa and a pair of breeding Twite in the Ochils. These are first breeding records for the Atlas, and in the case of the former, for Clackmannanshire within its current and historically recent boundaries as well. The Twite record is only the 2nd confirmed breeding record for the wee county. A Red Kite seen over Ben Cleuch in July and a Goshawk near Dollar in April were also first records for the Atlas. Several small colonies of breeding Tree Sparrow were located on the east side of Alloa and around Clackmannan Town. The survey is also important for identifying species no longer present and neither Cuckoo, Ring Ouzel, Osprey nor Black Grouse have been recorded to date. The number of species with at least a 'possible' breeding record for the Atlas now stands at 102 with a further 21 being observed only. The most commonly recorded species are Carrion Crow (126 squares), Wren (106), Chaffinch (103), Wood Pigeon (102), followed by Blackbird, Blue Tit, Robin, Skylark & Blue Tit. As well as Common Gull & Twite, first confirmed atlas breeding records were received for Tufted Duck, Water Rail, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Stock Dove & Tree Pipit.

Naturally, field survey work has taken priority in the early years and things have been quieter on the publication front. However Richard Daly has come on board as art editor, co-opting renowned local bird artist Darren Rees as his co-art editor. Also, respected local wildlife photographer, David Jones, has kindly agreed to provide photographs of birds and habitats for that section of the book. Writers for the species reports also continue to be recruited and if anyone would like to write the account for a particular species, please contact me (details below).

During the year, Angus Smith resigned from the steering group on completion of his three year term as chair of the local SOC branch but, as already noted, Richard Daly (the new chair) has joined, as has John Calladine of BTO Scotland and Don Matthews.

We are still welcoming volunteers for the survey work, either to take on a specific km square(s) or submit records of breeding birds anywhere in Clackmannanshire. If you can help either way, please contact me.

Neil Bielby, 56 Ochiltree, Dunblane, FK15 ODF. 01786 823830, (e-mail:- neil.bielby@tiscali.co.uk)

John James Audubon and Sir Walter Scott

Few Scottish bird watchers may be aware of the fact that one of the magnets that drew Audubon to Edinburgh and Scotland was Sir Walter Scott. Audubon had apparently read a lot of Scott in America, and crossed the Atlantic determined to meet the great man.

In his Journal, written in Edinburgh in December 1826, Audubon wrote: "How many times have I longed for Sir Walter Scott to come to my beloved country that he might describe, as no one else ever can, the stream, the swamp, the river, the mountain, for the sake of future ages. A century hence they will not be there as I see them. Nature will have been robbed of so many brilliant charms. The rivers will be tormented and turned from their primitive courses, the hills will be leveled with the swamps and perhaps the swamp will become a mound, surmounted by a fortress of a thousand guns. The deer may exist nowhere, fish will no longer abound in the rivers, the eagle scarce ever alight, and the millions of lovely songsters will be driven away or slain by man. Without Sir Walter Scott, these beauties may perish unknown to the world".

Sir Walter Scott never ventured to the New world, but Audubon left both an artistic and literary record that will stand as a testament to the abundance that the continent held, until it was tamed by the new settlers. We may still regret that Walter never went...

Michael Thomas

Michael has just completed a chapter for a book to be published in Spring 2006 by Routledge. The book is titled 'Consuming Books' edited by Stephen Brown. Chapter 3 is titled 'The making and marketing of an $8.8 million book - the story of John James Audubon's Birds of America*'.*

Scottish Executive Proposals - ACTION REQUIRED

Please take time to read this and take action, the implications of these proposals could affect us all - it will only take a few minutes.

RSPB Scotland, as part of Scottish Environment LINK, has joined with the Association of Scottish Community Councils to seek changes to the Scottish planning system (applications for development etc.) to provide more rights for individuals, communities and NGOs. When the Executive consulted on such changes, 86% respondents supported the move. However, instead of establishing real rights for people in an accessible planning system, new proposals outlined in the Planning White Paper could actually reduce people's rights. It not only rejects a limited Right of Appeal for third parties, it also proposes a National Planning Framework which would take national strategic decisions on major projects – for example, landfill sites, pylon lines, motorways or wind farms - without the chance for challenge or public inquiry.

As proposed, you would be unable to appeal decisions, because they would be taken at national level and would not be open to public challenge or inquiry. Even your elected representatives, at the regional and perhaps the national level too, may struggle to have any means of challenging decisions made in this document. The debate is not over. The legislation still has to be considered by the Scottish Parliament.

We have, therefore, lodged a petition at the Scottish Parliament asking MSPs to challenge the Executive's thinking, and to make amendments to the forthcoming planning bill. **There are three ways you can help us in this process**:

- **1. Sign the e-petition**, co-sponsored by Scottish Environment LINK and the Association of Scottish Community Councils, by going to http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk/viewtopic.asp?TopicID=66. It will take 2 minutes – you can comment and share your experiences of the planning system on the discussion forum too.
- **2. Let your MSP know** you want real rights in the planning system. You can contact your MSP, at the click of a mouse, on the letter/email facility set up on www.everyonecan.org.
- Please **pass on this information** or the links, to your friends, family or anyone else who may be interested.

Thanks for reading this far - please do try and find a moment to do one, or all three, of the above. Remember that you will be signing/writing as individuals, so home addresses/e-mails are best.

If you'd like more information, further briefings are available on www.everyonecan.org, or contact Lloyd Austin Head of Policy Operations RSPB Scotland Headquarters, Dunedin House, 25 Ravelston Terrace, Edinburgh, EH4 3TP. Tel: 0131-311-6500. Fax: 0131-311-6569. www.rspb.org.uk/scotland

Waterston House Diary

SOC staff finally moved into the spacious new Waterston House on 1st July, after their three year sojourn in the Harbour Point, Musselburgh office.

Along with summer workers Jean Torrance, Windy Miller and helpers, Dave Allan and Stuart Rivers, myself and Kate travelled the 12 miles along the coast road with 24 tons of books from the George Waterston Library. This was followed by more van loads of IKEA furniture, computers and filing. At the Aberlady end we depended on many willing helpers to unpack the 800 or so boxes over most of July.

Waterston house interior *(Bill Gardner)*

The new location, building, interior, views, office facilities and landscaping are simply superb. Every single visitor we have had so far has gone away impressed by how much a small organisation has been able to achieve with home grown Scottish timber, courtesy of Forest Enterprise, Scotland (& James Jones Ltd, Russwood and BSW) plus attractive stone from Caithness and Aberfoyle. The work of the frame maker Carpenter Oak and Woodland Ltd. has also been particularly admired. Lafarge Cement is our nearest Sponsor, from Dunbar, and they kindly provided all the cement for our large concrete base. Their sister company Redland Roofing gave us a great deal on the Rosemary tiles. We are looking forward to the colder weather too to try out the boilers donated by Worcester Bosch!

CALA's Chairman Geoff Ball was one of the first visitors, along with Jill Gray, CALA Homes' Sales Director. Geoff was suitably impressed by the build quality and the fact that we had managed to run the project pretty close to budget and to time. CALA were of course the main external cash sponsor and SOC is most grateful to Geoff and his colleagues for all their practical support. Through them we also received a very kind gift of all our porcelain tiles for the toilets and kitchen from Porcelanosa, plus support from REAL PR.

Over August the staff team plus many, many SOC volunteers from near and far also helped re-commission the Library on the new Forster shelving system. Two tons of books on each stack can be moved with just a single finger. The team also inserted security strips in each of the 10,000 books and have also audited the collection. In particular John Davis, Keith Macgregor, Bill & Jean Torrance helped organise all the volunteers to free the books from their three years hibernation.

Waterston house exterior *(Bill Gardner)*

Members are now welcome to come and use the Library and see the building as it gradually develops over the Autumn.

The official opening by Magnus Magnusson CBE will be on 1st of October. Due to the extensive number of official external invitations that SOC Council has to issue and the large number of representatives from SOC Branches and Committees, access on that day will be restricted to the official guest list. You are welcome however to come before, or after that date. A warm welcome awaits you at Waterston House!

Bill Gardner MBE
SOC Development Manager

A letter from the past

Following the piece on Seton Gordon (SBN 76), Malcolm Harvey has sent us an 'archive' letter from which we quote extracts below. It was sent in 1944 from Rev. John Lees, a keen ornithologist in the Black Isle, to a friend, Ewart Jones, who had been posted by the army to that area during the war and was by then living in Hampshire and corresponding about the birds there.

...Your flocking Wrens are both interesting and perplexing. Had it been one of my newspaper correspondents, I should have written back to tell him that such a thing was simply not done; that Wrens were solitary and individual up to December, and after that they might be seen in pairs; that he might have seen several in fairly close proximity in September or even October, for young Wrens keep their juvenility rather longer than Robins, etc, etc; but when the discoverer of the Parus Cristatus Scoticus, var. Ardmeanachensis discovers also flocking Wrens, well, I should like very much to have been there to share the joys of this discovery.

Well, I have been chasing Wrens (sometimes literally) over cliffs and bogs, through heather and bracken for years past and except for spells of social roosting in the winter 1944–5, the birds have kept constantly true to the best canons of troglodytine behaviour and have done what the *Handbook of British Birds* told them to do without question (*ie Witherby 1938–41*).

In fact in recent months, I have been making tentative explorations into a habitat that it seems has hardly received sufficient attention from ornithologists - the bracken land. It is a marvellous country for birds. There is more perfect cover there for the skulkers than any other. There was a Robin along the Rosemarkie shore way that had a marvellous winter territory, consisting of 3 or 4 acres of pure bracken. Even in winter, the owner could move from end to end or from side to side of his land without ever once coming into view. The same ground included one Stonechat, one Wren and one Hedgesparrow. The Robin, having none of his own kind to bother him, displayed at the Stonechat, who teased him by shooting out his black head; then master Robin having no interest in black heads went off in disgust. Along the shore, there are umpteen Wren territories, mostly among bracken, but never once have I seen more than one Wren at one spot at one time.

Now supposing there had been four Wrens, I should have anticipated that if in a flock, they would have called almost simultaneously, like the Tits, the Chaffinches and the Siskins – the pack call would be all the more necessary where among the bracken it would be so easy to lose touch with others of the flock. Now I may have missed seeing a few Wrens in the bracken but am quite certain I did not miss hearing a pack conversation from several birds. So with perfect conviction I can plead no evidence at all of Wrens flocking in this part of the world.

Female Crossbill *(Harry Scott)*

...Our Black Isle warblers are doing very well. We have Chiffchaffs (any amount) and Lesser Whitethroats regularly nesting, both in flagrant violation of the Handbook. Blackcaps are a bit irregular and the Avoch families failed to turn up last year, though there were others not far away.

You mention cold as one of the enemies of Dartford Warblers. I think the coldness of spring, especially in Scotland, has a very sad effect on many species. I was weighing young Robins simultaneously with David Lack at Oxford and my first broods were all below his, so far that I was convinced that a large proportion would not survive. In June, the tables were completely turned and my young Robins weighed almost 2 grams more than his. Other evidence is there that the bulk of our early breeders lose most of their families through spring chill.

A gamekeeper friend of mine was interested in Crossbills (*Scoticus*) but found that they nested in the month of Feb. and failed dismally to bring their families up. So he conceived a plan. All the Feb. nests that could be found were duly destroyed. In March, the birds were all busy again – so the second nests were also wiped out and the process was continued until May when the nests were left alone. Result, all the young birds reared in warmer conditions were successful. The job was carried out for several years running with the consequence that at the end of the time, the estate was swarming with Crossbills. I sometimes wonder if it would not be a good plan to turn the riotous youth loose in the country during April to destroy every nest they find and keep it up till mid-May. The birds would rebuild all right and the young would come along strong and healthy, instead of all those sickly youngsters that at present flood into the country before there is food for them. Organise a plan, a society for the spoliation of birds' nests. It seems in any case that birds seemed to thrive much better when the bad boys in the olden time robbed and plundered right and left.

Well, having given vent to this shattering theory, I expect you are getting a bit fed up with all this vapouring. Hope you may manage a North visit this year. We expect to be living at Rosemarkie during July and August.

Shall look out for Wrens, All the best from all to all, John Lees.

John Lees of course lived and birdwatched in the Black Isle during the war right through to the 1950s and it was he who discovered that Rock Doves nested throughout the year. His observations on other birds were mentioned in Bannerman and Baxter & Rintoul.

Time to act

Hen Harrier - bird under threat. *(Bernard Zonfrillo)*

Despite best intentions to prevent wildlife crime, we have seen over the past few years an almost total disregard for the Law by some shooting estates and the issuing of Licences by the Scottish Executive to them to kill protected species on the flimsiest of evidence. 'Hunting interests' claim that these species are causing 'economic' harm. It seems that clear protection measures and the introduction of custodial sentences have been swept aside in the pursuit of income generated by those who like to destroy wild birds, fish and animals for amusement and invite tourists to also join in.

Partly this is down to landowners instructing their gamekeepers to break the law as it stands and partly the encouragement they derive from those in legal or civil authority who either dismiss criminal activity lightly or who are themselves part of the hunting and shooting fraternity. Some are clearly reluctant to punish the lawbreakers.

As ornithologists, we know well that prime habitat for species like Hen Harrier and Black-throated Diver is vacant over large parts of Scotland where it should be filled and where is was filled in the not so distant past. This dearth is not due to some problematical weather patterns or lack of suitable conditions for breeding but is down to direct illegal persecution. We all know it happens.

We are informed by none other than the newly appointed police wildlife crime liaison officer Constable James McGovern, in April 2005, that some gamekeepers are resorting to desperate measures, such as poisoning wild birds, to "keep their estates afloat". Bank robbers might offer much the same economic excuse for their activities.

If this is the case and shooting and fishing estates can only exist largely through criminal activity then it is time to take drastic measures. We are often told that these Victorian estates create jobs and provide millions of pounds of income for Scotland. However since most Scottish estates are owned by English-based consortia and the jobs involved are amongst the lowest paid, there seems little to justify their relentless killing of protected wildlife, an asset that has been recently calculated at around £80 million per annum simply for visitors to watch and enjoy. It is far more income for the rural economy than any estates engender (recently calculated at £18 million) through their activities, although they will claim that almost every tourist to Scotland is part of their 'scene'.

What is urgently required is a licensing system that will control both the legal and illegal activities on shooting and fishing estates. It can be easily done. I give for discussion these examples of legislation that could and should be adopted.

- Estates must apply for a licence to operate and their principal areas of operation precisely defined.
- Damage reported by protected species to other wildlife on estates must be examined and verified by an independent authority of say five qualified biologists and ecologists, before any action can be taken or recommended.
- Those that don't comply with the law or are guilty of illegal practices will have their licence withdrawn and cannot operate in that designated activity, either for a stated period or indefinitely. Their land will thereafter be subject to scrutiny by independent visitors.
- All guns or indeed fishing rods and other equipment should be confiscated or removed from an estate during the ban and the electronic tagging of individuals employed in wildlife 'management' introduced if found guilty of criminal activity.

Part of complying with the licence should also allow for independent supervisors to enter estates unannounced and at any time without prior notice, to ensure that the terms of the licence are being followed.

With the 'right to roam' now part of our legislation the time to police the activities of the unscrupulous is now.

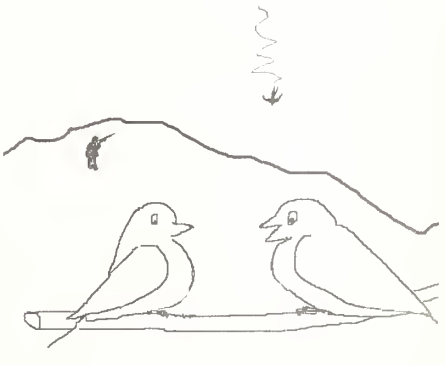
Were these simple procedures to be put in place, the whole complexion of the Scottish countryside would change. There are not that many estates to make it impractical. Allied to the changes in land use and Government animal subsidies, estates with rare or Schedule 1 breeding species could attract higher income based on species and numbers breeding within them.

Only harmful alien species would be controlled without licensing and under strict independent supervision. This might also mean that biologists and rangers rather than gamekeepers would be employed in future.

Will any MSPs be willing to introduce the necessary legislation? Some of them seem so ill-informed that it may well prove hopeless. We have seen a so-called foxhunting ban introduced in Scotland that appears to have more loopholes than the average mist-net. The random slaughter of foxes, crows (including Jays) etc., for trivial reasons most of which simply boil down to the love of hunting, must cease. Then perhaps a more natural balance will return to the Scottish countryside.

Or will we face a future where the illegal killing of our magnificent wildlife goes on without redress, just as before? Time to act.

Bernard Zonfrillo (July 2005)



I know it looks bad, but just remember, they're the "guardians of the countryside"!

The birds of Fetlar

Stany Holm and Grassy Holm. *(Malcolm Smith)*

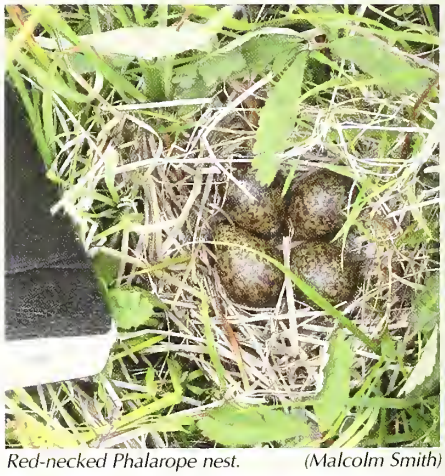
Fetlar is the smallest of the three inhabited North Isles of Shetland, positioned to the east of Unst and Yell. It's quite a small island, being about 10 km long and 6 km wide and has a population just short of 100. Land-use on the island is largely agricultural, with many small, scattered crofts and a few larger units that are big enough to describe as small farms. Despite the relatively rich soil, which led to the island being called the Garden of Shetland, very little cropping is now practised and nearly all agricultural land is now utilised for grazing or silage production. Sheep are the dominant livestock, although several crofters are involved in producing beef cattle. The main "outby" habitats are upland serpentine heath in the north/central areas and blanket bog, which is restricted to the Lamb Hoga peninsula in the south west. Although the seas around the island are productive, fishing has always been a marginal activity due to the lack of a good natural harbour. The cliffs are not as dramatic as some neighbouring islands, reaching c120m at the Blue Banks along the northern coast, but the coastal landscape is wonderful, being peppered by many arches and caves. There are also three gorgeous sandy beaches, including the Sands of Paradise, where it is rumoured that the Vikings made their first landfall on British soil.

It has several claims to birdwatching fame, including having held the country's only breeding Snowy Owls and for being the best place in the UK to observe breeding Red-necked Phalaropes.

The first Snowy Owl nest was found by Bobby Tulloch in June 1967; seven eggs were laid and five young eventually fledged. The male continued to breed every year until 1975; he died or left during the winter of 1975/76. In the last three breeding seasons (1973–75) the male was bigamous, but only one brood of chicks fledged in each of these years. A total of 23 young fledged in the nine years in which they bred. Following the disappearance of the male, several females remained and occasional infertile clutches were laid up until 1990. It is thought that breeding was originally initiated by an increase in the rabbit population in the late 1960s, but the introduction of myxomatosis caused rabbit numbers to decline during the 1970s. The reduction in clutch sizes through the 1970s may have been a reflection of this. Since 1995 there have only been two records of Snowy Owls in Shetland, where it has assumed its previous status as a rare migrant.

Fetlar folk cut peat in the serpentine mires of Fetlar until the 1930s and this, along with cattle grazing and cutting for hay, may have helped to produce an ideal habitat for breeding Red-necked Phalaropes. After these practices stopped, the mires dried up, making them less suitable for feeding phalaropes. Their population increased in the early 1990s, apparently as a consequence of the RSPB's programme of raising water levels and excavating pools using mechanical diggers. It reached 40 males in 1996, mostly on Fetlar, but the reasons for a sharp decline between 1997 and 1998 remain unclear. Since then the population has gradually increased again, with 30 males recorded in 2005; 20 of them on Fetlar. Despite several hundred phalaropes being ringed on Fetlar over the years, we've had no recoveries from outside Shetland. It's sometimes difficult to explain to visitors that these tiny freshwater waders spend most of the year feeding on plankton in sub-tropical seas and frustrating to admit that we don't know where Fetlar birds actually winter – although the Arabian Sea seems to be the best bet. The phalarope breeding season is geared to suit the short sub-Arctic summer, with the first females arriving in mid-late May and the last juveniles leaving by mid-August. June and July are the only months when phalaropes are easily seen by the edge of the Loch of Funzie and from the hide at the adjacent Mires of Funzie. Many visitors are surprised by how approachable the birds are and it's a common sight to see visitors hurrying to replace their enormous 600mm lenses with something that can focus a bit closer!

Red-necked Phalarope female. *(Malcolm Smith)*



Red-necked Phalarope nest. *(Malcolm Smith)*

Others waders breed in important numbers in Fetlar – for example there are 60 pairs of Whimbrel and over 100 pairs of both Golden Plover and Dunlin. Unfortunately many of the island's wader populations are decreasing; for example Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Curlew, Redshank and Whimbrel all declined between 1996 and 2003. There has been little obvious habitat change during this period and it's possible that climatic changes are having an adverse effect on these birds.

The other important group of breeding birds is, of course, our seabirds. While cliff-nesting birds such as Guillemots, Razorbills and Kittiwakes only breed in small numbers, the ubiquitous Fulmars seem to nest on every available ledge – the most recent count was of more than 10,000 pairs.

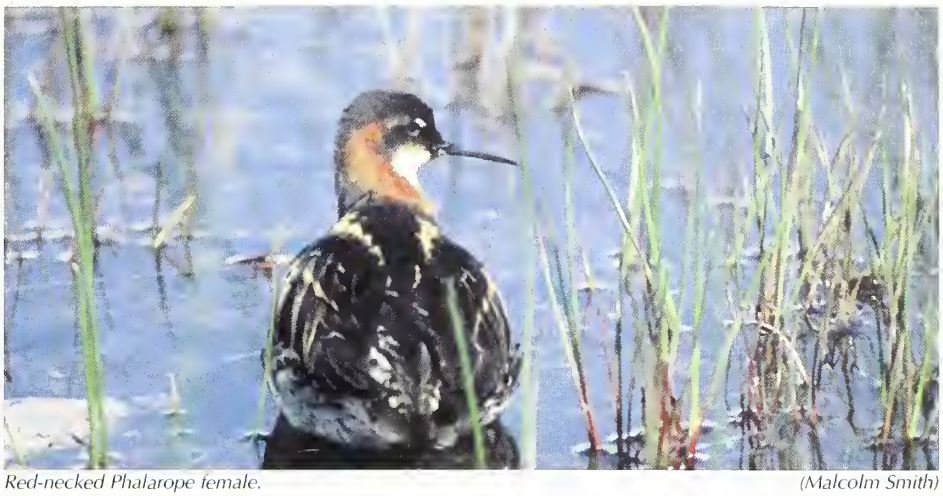
Red-throated Divers occur in good numbers on Fetlar, with over 20 pairs being recorded in recent years. While they are declining in most parts of Shetland, the

Fetlar population is increasing, possibly due to pool-creation by the RSPB at phalarope breeding mires.

Manx Shearwaters are rare breeding birds in Shetland and the small, dispersed colony on Lamb Hoga may be the last one. Up to 150 rafting birds were recorded in the 1970s but now you're lucky to see any at all, although we know there are still a few occupied burrows. Feral cats are present on the cliffs of Lamb Hoga (and on cliffs at former colonies on Foula and Unst) and may be responsible for their decline. Fetlar is the largest island in Shetland with breeding Storm Petrels, most of which nest on Lamb Hoga. Many of the breeding sites are inaccessible, but the colony at Grunni Geo on the western side of Lamb Hoga is a good place to watch them come in at nightfall.

Fetlar is a particularly good place to see Black Guillemots (*tysties*) – a count of pre-breeding adults in 1999 produced over 1,400 birds. Sadly, our Arctic Terns are not faring so well. They rely heavily on sandeels, are unable to dive and cannot travel far to forage while they are nesting and have therefore suffered greatly in recent years. In the 1980s over 2,000 pairs of terns were recorded, but these days numbers can be less than 100 pairs and it's not uncommon for them to completely fail to produce any young. Despite their aggressive behaviour at breeding colonies, many Shetlanders have a fondness for *tirricks*; greeted as harbingers of spring. If they were to disappear, they would be sadly missed by locals and visitors alike.

Arctic Skuas (*scooty alans*) are a particular favourite of mine and I never fail to be impressed by them as they twist and turn while trying to rob terns of their fish. A recent count of Arctic Skuas only produced 96 pairs compared with over 200 in the early 1970s. Their reliance on stolen sandeels and competition from Great Skuas (*bonxies*) has led to a situation where their presence is becoming increasingly tenuous and these days you'd be very lucky to see any fledged young. *Bonxies* can't claim to be the best loved of Fetlar's birds! Some are in the habit of killing unaccompanied or injured lambs and they are becoming an increasing problem around seabird colonies, where the absence of sandeels is leading some to become specialists in killing adult and young seabirds. Due to its restricted global range, it's arguably Shetland's most important bird and, love them or hate them, it's hard not to be impressed by their speed, agility and brute force! While it's true that *bonxies* suffer low productivity in "poor sandeel years", the population continues to increase. Nearly 600 pairs now breed on Fetlar compared with fewer than 300 only 20 years ago.



Red-necked Phalarope female. *(Malcolm Smith)*

Little work has been done on Fetlar's breeding songbird populations and they tend to be overlooked throughout Shetland. The range of breeding songbird species is limited, but the density of Meadow Pipits, Skylarks and Wheatears is impressive. The dawn chorus of hundreds of displaying Skylarks form a wonderful background against the screaming *tirricks*, meowing *scooty alans*, the staccato piping of Whimbrels and the sombre whistle of Golden Plovers contrasts markedly with the desolate silence of the hills in winter.

Most of our summering birds head south for the winter and the few hardy species that remain are joined by quite small numbers of birds escaping the Arctic winter. We don't get large numbers of wintering wildfowl in Fetlar, but Whooper Swans, Tufted Duck, Long-tailed Ducks and Great Northern Divers can be found easily. We are sometimes graced by flocks of Snow Buntings and, if we're very lucky the odd Gyrfalcon, Ring-necked Duck or King Eider. Late winter can produce some very special birds; for example, 30 White-billed Divers have been recorded in the 'Bluemull Triangle', most of them in late April or early May. Records of rare winter vagrants are sparse but include Brunnich's Guillemot found in December 1997.

Spring migration can produce good falls of common migrants returning to their breeding grounds in Scandinavia with Robins, Goldcrests, Bramblings, Willow Warblers and Pied Flycatchers often being joined by scarcer birds such as Wrynecks, Bluethroats and Red-backed Shrikes. Spring can produce even rarer birds which have either overshot their more southern destination or even North American or Asian birds returning north presumably after spending the winter further south in Europe having strayed there during the previous autumn. Many of Fetlar's best records have been in spring or early summer, such as Pacific Golden Plover, Wilson's Phalarope, Scops Owl, Little Swift, Pechora Pipit, Black-throated Thrush, Paddyfield Warbler, Booted Warbler, Red-flanked Bluetail (also recorded here in autumn), Hermit Thrush, Common Yellowthroat, White-throated Sparrow and this spring's Terek Sandpiper.

Autumn, of course, produces the largest number of passage migrants with the peak usually being in September/October. If you're not used to Shetland-style birding, it can be weird to find so many woodland passerines sheltering in the lee of a cliff or in a patch of nettles. Whilst the numbers of flycatchers and warblers can be impressive, for sheer scale the fall of thrushes in late autumn can be astounding; it's possible to see several hundred Song Thrushes and Blackbirds, several thousand Redwings and over a thousand Fieldfares. The pattern of thrush movements can change from one day to the next and can also vary between islands – a 'Redwing day' on Fetlar can coincide with a 'Song Thrush day' on neighbouring Unst. Good autumn finds have included Isabelline Wheatear, Isabelline Shrike, Serin and Europe's first Chestnut-sided Warbler.

A visit to Fetlar is therefore an appealing prospect for a great range of breeding species and during spring and autumn – well, anything can turn up if you're lucky!

A trip from Lerwick to Fetlar takes about 3–4 hours. There are over 20 ferry crossings a day from Mainland to Yell and 5–6 from Yell to Fetlar; these should be booked in advance on 01957 722259. The award-winning Fetlar Interpretive Centre, which doubles as a Tourist Information Point is well worth a visit Tel: 01957 733 206. Good rooms and huge meals are available at the Gord Guest House Tel: 01957 733227.

Bird records and data are from RSPB archives and the essential Pennington M, Osborn K, Harvey P, Riddington R, Okill D, Ellis P and Heubeck M (2004) ***The Birds of Shetland***, Christopher Helm, London.

Malcolm Smith
Malcolm.smith@rspb.org.uk

The one that got away

Male Hen Harrier. *(dpalmar2000@yahoo.co.uk)*

Dramatic footage at the Clyde Muirshiel Hen Harrier project has allowed visitors to get a very rare glimpse of nature at its very best this summer. This is the third year that cameras have been placed beside a Hen Harrier nest and live images beamed to the Muirshiel Visitor Centre for the public to see. But visitors got more than they bargained for when an unexpected guest visited the nest.

The Hen Harriers are widely accepted as the most threatened raptors in the UK due to a long history of persecution by game interests. Almost extinct on the mainland in the early 1900s, they began to make a comeback during and after the 2nd World War when keepering was reduced on the moorlands. Since shooting has become less fashionable, a combination of new wildlife laws and conservation effort has allowed the species to return to many areas of Scotland. Sadly, localised persecution continues across the country and current estimates put the population at just 600 breeding pairs. The moorland of Clyde Muirshiel is home to an average of 10 breeding pairs each year.

This year, cameras were placed near a nest in June, showing a beautiful mature female incubating five eggs with a strong male in attendance. Unlike those filmed in the past, this pair got it all right – they were perfect textbook Hen Harriers! Where past females have fidgeted and looked unsettled, this one sat majestically on her nest looking distinctly proud of herself. A female will stay at the nest throughout the 4-week incubation period and for a week or so after hatching, keeping the eggs and chicks safe. In one of the most spectacular sights of the bird world, the male brings in prey that she takes from him in a dramatic mid-air food pass. While the female feeds, the male circles above the nest, keeping his family safe while she is distracted. The pair appeared to be experienced and competent, raising high hopes for the coming months.

Early on the morning of Wednesday 15th June, the first of the eggs hatched. On cue, the male upped his feeding rate and began bringing regular prey for his new family. Over the following days the whole clutch hatched, producing a brood of five and a big job for their parents. The male rose to the challenge and brought in plenty of food, his record being 32 feeds in one day! The whole family were well-fed and healthy, including the tiny male who was the last to hatch.

Hen Harriers are persecuted because of their reputation for taking grouse chicks, so monitoring of the prey species is a priority on the project. Over the three years of filming, we have seen just two grouse chicks taken into the nest alongside hundreds of Meadow Pipits, voles and even stoats – another classic enemy of the keeper. The footage from the 2004 nest is currently being studied more thoroughly and we hope that the results of this will be available soon.

The male kept up the good work and visitors watched as the chicks grew day by day. When they were about 10 days old, the female began leaving the nest for longer periods and hunting for herself. Then on the morning of Thursday 7th July, staff arrived at Muirshiel to find just one chick in the nest. There is recording 24 hours a day (mainly as extra security), so staff were able to run back through the footage to find out what had happened the previous evening.

At around 9pm both the parents were away from the nest area when a fox burst through the heather and dashed off with two of the chicks. At this early stage, the chicks' response to danger is to stay at the nest where their parents can defend them, so they were an easy target. A female Hen Harrier is a formidable creature with long, sharp talons and nerves of steel - probably a fair match for a fox, but she was unaware of the fox returning several times. It took four of the five chicks leaving only the youngest, and smallest. When approached, this tiny chick lashed out with its talons at the fox's nose, causing it to retreat backwards out of the nest and leave the area.

Chicks at 1 week. *(CM viewing project)*

The female returned a little later and appeared baffled by the sight of just one chick. She walked around him as though looking for the others hiding behind him. She then listened intently for a little while, looking into the thick heather around the nest before finally settling down for the night with her remaining chick.

The following day the youngster received 25 feeds – enough for five chicks! By the afternoon his crop was bulging with food as he turned his head away and backed off when his mother pushed food at him. The parents adapted quickly, reducing the number of feeds to six the next day. This was still more than his normal share and he thrived on the extra food.

Project staff were concerned that the fox might return but decided that it would be inappropriate to interfere with this natural process. For as long as the Hen Harriers have been here, foxes have taken a proportion of their chicks and so the population can deal with losing a few in this way. Although it was shocking to see, the footage is truly remarkable and makes stunning viewing. Everyone was relieved however when the fox failed to return!

Last chick preparing for flight. (CM viewing project)

Chick v fox. (CM viewing project)

The female from this nest is ringed, and volunteers spent many frustrating hours zooming in the camera to try to read her number. We eventually learned that she is five years old and was born just 10km from her current nest. She was also one of a brood of five, indicating that her successful hatching of five eggs was maybe not down to luck alone. Over the next week, as the chick's feathers appeared and he began to flap, staff made plans for him to be ringed too. He responded well, returning to normal behaviour within minutes of the ringers leaving the nest.

On the morning of Saturday 16th July the juvenile made his maiden flight, getting about 10 yards before crash-landing in the heather. He returned after a short while only to leave the nest for good later that day. Very soon the whole family disappeared off the moor following the Meadow Pipits down the valley as they began to flock for their long migration. The harriers disperse in the autumn and are likely to spend the winter in lowland areas, perhaps some way south of Muirshiel in an area such as the Solway.

The local community were invited to an end-of-season event at the McKillop Institute in Lochwinnoch to celebrate the successful fledging of the chick. Over 100 people attended, cheering when the chick fought off the fox and applauding when he successfully fledged.

An area of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park is a proposed Special Protection Area for the Hen Harrier, an international designation that will promote the sympathetic management of this vulnerable habitat for the species. To find out more and have your say, visit www.snh.org.uk or see leaflets at Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park.

Clyde Muirshiel Hen Harriers is a partnership between RSPB, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, SOC and Scottish Natural Heritage. Visitors are able to see live pictures alongside highlights and join volunteers for a guided walk on the nearby moorland. Over the three years, visitors have seen eight chicks raised to fledging, so in the future it may even be one of these we see raising their own family on camera. Join us in 2006 to enjoy an intimate peek into the secret world of these beautiful birds.

Lucy Moor,
Hen Harrier Information Officer, RSPB

The Breeding Bird Survey in Scotland (1994–2004)

The BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) had another very successful year in Scotland in 2004, with 272 1-km squares surveyed (7% higher than 2003). Record coverage was achieved in Fife, Lothian and Orkney. However, survey participation remains sparse in some of the less populated areas of western Scotland, although BBS results are weighted to account for differences in sampling intensity across the country.

Map illustrating the distribution of surveyed 1 km squares

Species recorded

A total of 160 species was recorded on BBS visits in Scotland in 2004 and, of these, Wren and Chaffinch were the most widespread, both being recorded on 78% of squares, followed by Meadow Pipit, Skylark and Willow Warbler (all 68%). A number of interesting species were recorded, including Marsh Harrier, Quail, Turtle Dove, Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Marsh Tit, Nuthatch and Chough, all rare or on the edge of their natural range in Scotland. A number of scarce or late winter visitors were also noted (Great Northern Diver, Jack Snipe and Great Grey Shrike), plus three flocks of Pink-footed Geese and single flocks of Barnacle and White-fronted Geese in various parts of Scotland.

Population trends

The figures presented in the trends table are the percentage changes in population levels for the respective time periods, marked with an asterisk where significant. For the 1994–2004 period, the lower and upper 95% confidence limits are given. The sample size indicated is the mean number of squares occupied each year over the survey period 1994–2004 (excluding squares where the species was recorded in only one year). Species in bold are Red-listed and those in italics Amber-listed in Population Status of Birds in the UK. Trends for species in parenthesis must be treated with caution, because it is considered that the species is either poorly covered by the BBS method, or a high proportion of the counts were likely to have been made away from breeding sites.

A total of 53 species was recorded on an average of 30 or more squares in Scotland, and of these, six had declined significantly and 20 had increased significantly between 1994 and 2004. For many species, the trends in Scotland were broadly similar to those in England, including significant increases in Buzzard and some of our familiar garden birds such as Blue Tit, Great Tit, Goldfinch and Greenfinch. At the other end of the spectrum, numbers of Kestrel, Swift and Curlew all declined significantly in both countries. A number of species continued to fare better in Scotland than in other parts of the UK. Willow Warbler numbers increased significantly in Scotland during 1994–2004, whereas their counterparts in England and Wales declined. Likewise, Cuckoo, Mistle Thrush and House Sparrow all increased significantly north of the border, whilst showing a downward trend in England. Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Starling and Yellowhammer also declined significantly in England, although their numbers remain relatively stable in Scotland.

Willow Warbler

In Scotland, Willow Warblers are common and widespread, being recorded on 74% of BBS squares in 2004, compared to only 32% in South East England. It is probably the country's most numerous summer-visitor, with at least 600,000 pairs in Scotland where numbers have increased by 43% since 1994. Numbers have also

Population changes in Scotland for species recorded on a mean of 30 or more squares per year for 2003–04 and 1994–2004.

Species	*Sample*	*Change 03–04*	*Change 94–04*	*lcl*	*Ucl*	*Species*	*Sample*	*Change*	*Change*	*lcl 03–04*	*ucl 94–04*
(Grey Heron)	42	-7	84	*20	184	**Song Thrush**	134	-6	22	*2	47
Mallard	85	-21	4	-19	34	*Mistle Thrush*	60	9	80	*31	149
Buzzard	101	-8	63	*27	109	Sedge Warbler	47	5	-1	-29	36
Kestrel	41	-1	-31	*-52	-1	Whitethroat	57	-6	63	*19	123
Red Grouse	55	-34	-12	-37	23	Blackcap	31	-24	77	*13	177
Pheasant	100	18	5	-13	27	*Willow Warbler*	173	15	43	*26	63
Oystercatcher	116	13	-12	-24	2	*Goldcrest*	71	2	149	*91	226
Golden Plover	42	11	-3	-30	33	Coal Tit	97	-17	18	-3	45
Lapwing	84	8	-35	*-47	-20	Blue Tit	123	-7	46	*23	72
Snipe	51	17	69	*26	127	Great Tit	109	8	64	*33	101
Curlew	119	-11	-43	*-52	-33	Magpie	34	2	66	*20	129
Common Sandpiper	34	-10	-17	-42	18	Jackdaw	91	7	15	-9	44
Feral Pigeon	51	11	21	-14	68	Rook	96	-34	-5	-29	27
Wood Pigeon	159	-15	-13	-24	0	Carrion Crow	150	11	-3	-19	16
Collared Dove	36	15	-1	-30	38	Hooded Crow	49	-3	-37	*-53	-14
Cuckoo	63	51	63	*23	115	Raven	37	-3	76	*13	174
Swift	41	31	-49	*-64	-27	**Starling**	122	9	13	-11	44
Skylark	183	5	4	-7	16	**House Sparrow**	73	-17	39	*12	73
Swallow	133	3	3	-12	22	Chaffinch	191	0	1	-8	11
House Martin	45	22	201	*92	374	Greenfinch	82	25	35	*5	74
Meadow Pipit	191	-5	-5	-14	6	Goldfinch	63	-24	52	*7	117
Pied Wagtail	115	-7	30	*5	60	Siskin	54	-2	-40	*-58	-15
Wren	178	18	87	*63	113	**Linnet**	79	-38	-23	-41	2
Dunnock	104	-19	20	-5	51	*Lesser Redpoll*	35	-34	-20	-48	22
Robin	152	10	8	-6	25	**Yellowhammer**	86	2	-9	-24	10
Wheatear	71	8	10	-14	41	**Reed Bunting**	41	-24	3	-28	47
Blackbird	148	-4	11	-1	25						

Willow Warbler: % change in numbers (1994-2004), and % of squares where birds were recorded in 2004.		
Region	% change (94-04)	occurrence 2004
East of England	-62%	33%
South West	-56%	42%
South East	-53%	32%
West Midlands	-45%	49%
England	-31%	42%
Wales	-23%	74%
Yorkshire	-20%	55%
North East	-19%	71%
East Midlands	-9%	50%
North West	12%	58%
Scotland	43%	74%
N Ireland	60%	81%

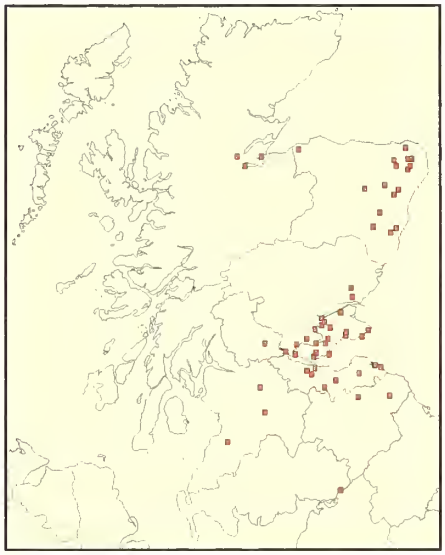
increased in Northern Ireland over the same period. However, since the late 1980s, numbers have fallen sharply in England, particularly in the south and midlands where declines of more than 50% have been recorded in some regions since 1994. A similar downward trend has been noted in Wales.

The Willow Warbler is near the edge of its natural range in southern England, and climatic warming may be pushing this range northwards. Results from Constant Effort Sites indicate that breeding productivity has declined, and data from nest record cards have shown an increase in the number of nests failing at the egg stage, together with a trend towards earlier egg-laying. However, as with most long-distance migrants, conditions in their wintering grounds south of the Sahara, strongly influence the numbers of birds that make it back to the UK the following season to breed.

The Corvids

The BBS is able to monitor the changing numbers of six species of corvid in Scotland. It comes as no surprise that the Magpie, which is at the northern limit of its natural range in Scotland, has shown a significant increase in numbers since 1994. Conversely, Hooded Crow numbers have declined as the population has been pushed northwards, although no corresponding increase in Carrion Crow has been noted. In common with most of the UK, Ravens continue to increase in Scotland while populations of Carrion Crow, Jackdaw and Rook appear to be stable. The Jay is currently not recorded on enough squares for Scottish trends to be calculated. However, it continues to increase in occurrence in Scotland, and in 2004 was noted on 23 squares (8% of the total), compared to only 6 squares (2%) in 1994.

Fourteen species were recorded on 20–29 squares in Scotland, and hence too few squares for Scottish population trends to be calculated. These include three UK Biodiversity Action Plan species (Grey Partridge, Spotted Flycatcher and Bullfinch) as well as Redshank, Stock Dove, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Tree Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Dipper, Whinchat, Stonechat, Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit and Treecreeper. However, as a result of increased coverage in Scotland, the BBS is now able to monitor the trends of Scottish Blackcap for the first time. Blackcaps were recorded on 18% of BBS squares in Scotland in 2004, compared to only 8% in 1994. Similar patterns of increased occurrence have been noted for Whitethroat, Garden Warbler and Chiffchaff.



BBS data are revealing some interesting distribution patterns for some species. This map shows the BBS squares where Grey Partridge have been recorded in Scotland since 1994. It shows the now, very local occurrence of this species, concentrated in Fife, Lothian and Aberdeenshire.

For more information about the BBS, please visit the website: www.bto.org/bbs, or contact your Regional Organiser or Jacquie Kaye at BTO Scotland (email: jacqui.kaye@bto.org, tel: 01786-466-564).

The BBS is organised through the BTO's network of voluntary Regional Organisers, as follows: Aberdeen (John Littlejohn); Angus (Ken Slater); Argyll South, Bute & Gigha (Richard Allan); Argyll North, Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morvern (Sue Dewar); Ayrshire (Brian Broadley); Benbecula & the Uists (Brian Rabbitts); Borders (Steve Hunt); Caithness (Hugh Clark); Central (Neil Bielby); Dumfries (Mike Raven, BTO); Fife (Norman Elkins); Inverness-shire (Hugh Insley); Islay, Jura & Colonsay (Malcolm Ogilvie); Kincardine (Graham Cooper); Kirkcudbright (Andrew Bielinski); Lanark, Renfrew & Dunbarton (John Knowler); Lewis & Harris (Yvonne Benting); Lothian (Alan Heavisides); Moray & Nairn (Bob Proctor); Orkney (Colin Corse); Perthshire (Mike Raven, BTO); Ross-shire (Simon Cohen); Shetland (Dave Okill); Skye (Robert McMillan); Small Isles, Rum, Eigg, Muck, Canna (Bob Swann); Sutherland (David Devonport); Wigtown (Geoff Sheppard).

The BBS is organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), and jointly funded by BTO, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC, on behalf of Scottish Natural Heritage, English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

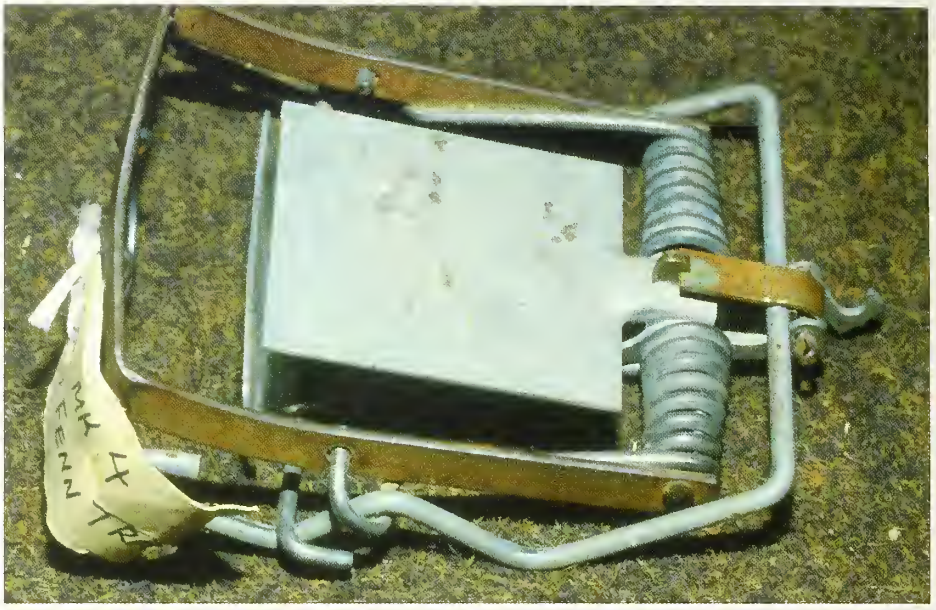
UK Biodiversity Action Plan species; Bullfinch. *(Harry Scott)*

Gin Traps in modern day Scotland

The gin trap was once a ubiquitous tool used very commonly on estates and farms throughout Scotland; its use is now completely outlawed. The term 'gin trap' is still in common usage to this day - I often receive records of 'gin traps' from members of the public when a couple of questions reveal that they have actually found a 'Fenn' or 'Springer' trap. In the early 20th century, the main legitimate uses of gin traps were for catching foxes and rabbits, being set at the entrance holes of their dens and burrows.

The gin trap – the term 'gin' having come from the archaic word 'engine', once used to describe any piece of machinery – is a leg-hold trap with toothed metal jaws triggered to snap shut and hold any part of an animal which unwittingly steps onto its square trigger plate. These solid metal traps normally have a long handle [see photo below].

At this point it is worth mentioning that there are legal types of spring trap [for use undercover and set to kill named target species of small mammal instantly] still widely used today, such as the Fenn trap – [see photo opposite].

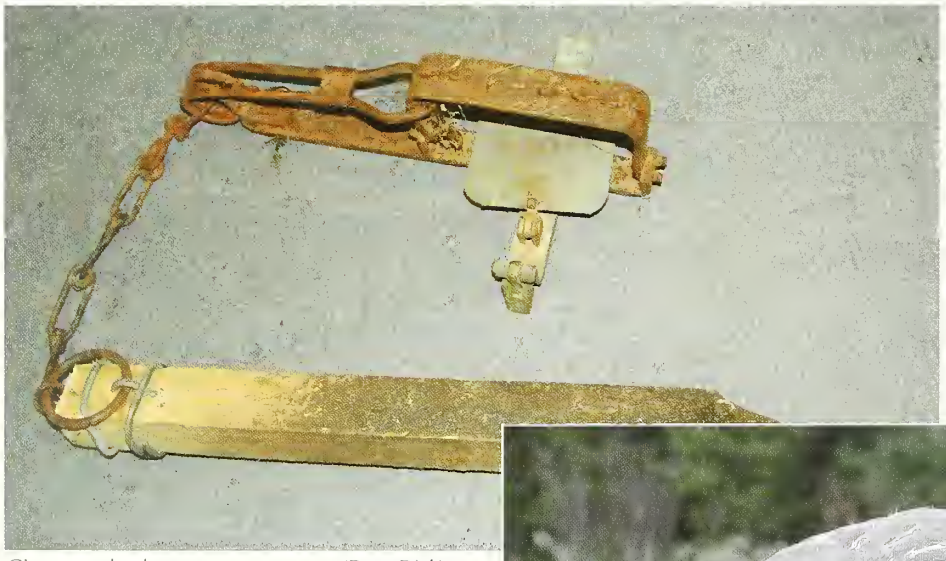


Fenn trap. *(Dave Dick)*

Their illegal use has never been restricted to mammals however and there were instances of gin traps being used against Golden Eagles reported to RSPB as recently as the early 1990s. A common Buzzard was found caught in a gin trap set in the open next to a dead rabbit on a shooting estate in Perthshire in 1996. I have also seen set gin traps balanced on top of fence posts around a recently ploughed field – presumably aimed at crows and gulls – in Morayshire. At one Galloway farm being searched for poisons in 2003, I found two set gin traps in a grain store – obviously for rats... but still illegal.

Almost every farm steading I have visited has a couple of old rusting gin traps at the back of a shed somewhere – there is no offence in possessing old gin traps [unless they are being used] and indeed they are commonly found as decorative items on the walls of pubs and cottages. They should be viewed however as a reminder of the 'bad old days' in the countryside when anything classed as 'vermin' could be destroyed by any means to hand. That could never happen today ...could it?

Dave Dick



Gin trap and stake. *(Dave Dick)*

Gin traps were banned for all use in England and Wales in 1958 – due to their undoubted cruelty to any animal being caught and held. Shamefully, it was not until 1974 that their use, latterly for foxes alone, was banned in Scotland. That was over 30 years ago but unfortunately RSPB Investigations staff still come across instances of recent use today. On 28th January 2005, a head gamekeeper of an estate near Tomatin, Inverness-shire was fined £500 after being found in possession of a sack full of gin traps which still had fresh cat hair and moss in the jaws of the traps and very fresh wooden stakes for holding them in place.

Potential fencepost trap victim. *(Harry Scott)*

Bean Geese in Central Scotland - an update

Bean Geese. *(John Simpson)*

Regular monitoring of the Bean Goose flock in Central Scotland started in December 1989 and has continued intensively to the present day. It has risen considerably in size from the 1989/90 figure of 112, to the last year's highest ever total of 262.

This increasing trend is very unusual in European Bean Goose populations, as most flocks are either decreasing or have completely disappeared from traditional haunts, with the exceptions being southern Sweden and Scotland. One can only speculate at the impact of global warming and the contraction of wintering ranges of a species of this type.

The Slamannan Flock, as it has become known, now arrives a little later, usually around late September/early October and leaves as early as mid-February though early March is the expected time of departure. This ostensibly means that with the sizable reduction in the much more famous flock in the Yare Valley, for much of the British winter, the Scottish birds are not only the only regular wintering Bean Geese but also the largest flock in the UK. I am sure you agree, a remarkable change in fortunes.

With the arrival of the first part of the flock imminent, the best place to look for them is around Easter Fannyside Loch and its adjacent moor. Most birdwatchers will know this site but probably don't know that it has been specifically bought as a reserve for Bean geese and is managed by RSPB. The lay-by next to the sailing club, which separates the lochs, is a good place to watch the birds coming into roost. However, to hedge your bets, you are better parking your car further north at the old peat works site. The building has long since been cleared but an area of hard standing exists and if you stand there and refrain from walking onto the moor, you can get some first rate views of birds coming into the flood pools there. Of course most know that the flock utilise the moor for loafing and resting during the day and it is always worth checking, before embarking on what can be a disappointing sojourn around the Slamannan plateau.

Over the years the flock has faced a vast array of pressures and it saddens me to look at the way the plateau has changed and the loss of once available grazing habitat the birds once enjoyed. Oh how the prophetic words of Donald Watson ring out now! The flock use to range all over the area from Fannyside in the west to Loch Ellrig in the east, close to the village of California. Nowadays the birds are mostly restricted to marginal improved or unimproved grazing in the most awkward and difficult of areas to observe.

However, this short note outlines the main localities and offers some suggestions where to get the best views. In my opinion the birds are at their best at the start of the season. They are usually on sites that are easier to watch and the weather is better. As the season wears on the birds become more unpredictable and usually select obscure sites that provide disturbance-free grazing and few opportunities for birdwatchers. Over the last few years, Luckenburn Farm has proved to be the most reliable and best place for good views of the flock. There is now a small community woodland car park to the east of Luckenburn Farm. Please use this and walk back along the roadside verge to view the three fields to the north of the road. Whilst it is incumbent on the farmer to open the car park, he occasionally forgets. In this case, please park sensibly on the Fannyside road to Cumbernauld and walk back to view the birds. It should be noted that the B803 is heavily used by local traffic and extreme care should be taken. If the birds are on the easterly field, the birds are best viewed by parking on the hard standing adjacent to Shielknowes farm and again standing on the roadside verge to view. The topography of a site and the birds' ability to melt into it plays a big part in site selection and 262 geese can quite easily hide at the top of each of these fields. To the north of this site is an area of unimproved grazing, which is slowly but surely succumbing to rushes. Blackhill is a site that the birds rely heavily on throughout the year as it provides disturbance-free grazing when they are moved on from other areas. It can only be safely watched from the minor road immediately east of Fannyside Mill Farm. You are over a kilometre from the birds at this point and it is an indication of how difficult it is to study a population of birds that are so sensitive to disturbance. However, park sensibly and view south

Bean Geese. *(John Simpson)*

from the grass verge next to the junction of the fence and dry stone dyke. The geese often feed within the *juncus*, within the wood at the top of the hill or behind the Scots Pine shelterbelt. Take five minutes to check as it could save you hours in the car slowly travelling round looking at empty fields.

If the birds are not at either of these sites then they have probably traversed the study area and gone to fields to the north. Unfortunately, due to changes in farming practice at Beam farm, the large field that was once a haven for the birds has not been used recently and I can only hope that its new owners will have a more sympathetic outlook this year. The birds have moved to an area immediately west called Tippetcraig. This area is very difficult to watch and is not recommended for viewing Bean Geese. There is no easy access and by walking up to the trig point you invariably disturb the birds. The flock used this site regularly last year and given the circumstances above, the birds were not put out on birdline - I hope I have your understanding on this issue. I trust the difficulty in studying these birds is apparent and that the security of a few core and very important sites is always maintained. Some additional useful information can be obtained from a web site maintained by Angus Maciver which is linked to the club website.

I have studied these birds for 15 years and have always accepted that after battling through the Glasgow traffic and getting to a frequently fog bound plateau, I must accept the view of the birds I have been given that day. Studying this particular flock of geese is like no other in the country. They are without question the wariest and most enigmatic of our regular wintering birds. They have the ability to utilise the terrain and exhibit behaviours which are unique to them. They are quite a challenge, but in recognition of the interest shown by birders wishing to see and learn more about them, a series of guided walks will be promoted through the excellent Scottish Birdline service run by Angus Murray. However, given the time and effort expended by so many people, don't dare turn up and take a glance through your telescope just to obtain a year tick ! The flock deserve much more interest than that. Meanwhile, the very best of luck when looking for the flock this year.

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Windfarms a threat? - or can birds adapt?

The examples of radio antennae and gas pipeline enclosures

The current fuss about windfarms merits comparison with some previous scares and their outcome. In the early 1970s a Naval radiocommunication station was built on an old airfield at Crimond overlooking the Loch of Strathbeg in NE Aberdeenshire. This is the largest coastal dune lake in Britain, and among other things an important staging post for wildfowl from the north-west, including hundreds of swans and thousands of geese (*Nature* 242: 93–95). Normally the local Environmental Liaison Group set up to watch development in the area would have opposed it vigorously, but the circumstances were not normal, since there had previously been a proposal to bring North Sea gas pipelines ashore across the loch to a processing plant on the airfield, and the radio station which displaced it was considered preferable and therefore not contested.

At their maximum, before the introduction of satellite communications, the radio antennae formed a dense network over 300 m. high covering an area of some 200 ha., which must have been one of the largest and most lethal aerial obstructions seen in Scotland. The wildfowl, which had previously been in the habit of settling on the airfield, suffered some mortality at first, especially when they came in to roost on the loch low against the wind, but it was small, of the order of dozens, and even less after the RSPB provided an alternative site at Starnafin nearby. It is difficult to think of anywhere in Britain with a greater concentration of large birds, and we found it astonishing that there has been so little trouble. Wildfowl are not fools, and can see a hazard ahead of them.

Where the gas terminal was displaced to St Fergus to the south in 1973 there were small colonies of ca 50 pairs of Arctic Terns and 25 Pairs of Black-headed Gulls on the slacks behind the dunes, and it was sadly accepted that they would have to move elsewhere. The following year the terns moved to the fields overlooking the slacks, and in due course to the rough ground within the gas terminal, which was soon surrounded by a double fox-proof fence. The RSPB Warden, Jim Dunbar, estimated that there must be hundreds by 1987, so through the courtesy of British Gas and Total we investigated the terminal with A.J.M. Smith in June 1988. There were about 500 pairs of Arctic and 100 pairs of Common Terns, 25 pairs each of Common and Black-headed Gulls, 3–5 pairs of Herring Gulls, and a number of nests and chicks of Oystercatchers, Redshank and Ringed Plover distributed around the site, which had previously been of little ornithological interest.

The Arctic Terns were nesting on a large area of grassy ground, and the gulls among the installations. It was reported that the Common Terns had started breeding on the shingle around the fire pool, but when a net was put around it about half had moved up to the flat roof of the single-story *Total* headquarters, where they had been joined by single pairs of Common Gulls and Oystercatchers (with one Oystercatcher's egg laid in a tern's nest). This was the second time a Common Gull had decided to breed on a *Total* roof (*Scottish Birds* 13: 229, reprinted in *British Birds* 81: 324–325). Unfortunately this situation was too good to last and when mustelids (Stoats and Weasels) subsequently got through the fences, all the nests were destroyed except those on the roof, though some birds are continuing to try nesting at this site.

There are two morals to this tale. In the first place, if the gas terminal had been located on the airfield it would not now have been big enough, so extensions would have had to be built elsewhere, though nobody thought of this at the time. Also conservationists should be more careful about predicting doom. Hundreds of gulls and terns also settled and bred for several years in a builders' storage site surrounded by a wall far from water in the industrial estate next to Aberdeen airport, and Common Gulls regularly breed in force in the local fenced gas pipeline inspection enclosures. As shown by Clive Craik (*Argyll Bird Report* 14: 98–110), the main action needed to protect terrestrial bird breeding sites is to trap ground predators, which are usually easy to catch, and one wonders to what extent 19th century gamekeeping was responsible for the increase in Scottish breeding duck species and then grebes at that time. Similarly the main threats to Hebridean birds seem to be introduced Mink, Ferrets and Hedgehogs, not wind farms.

W.R.P. Bourne

Digiscoping - a problem and a solution

This is not a professional review of camera models and their many admirable digiscoping accessories, but simply my experience of a problem and the solution that I found which suited me best.

The magic of 'digiscoping' is being able to photograph wildlife at a distance – the birds, insects or animals are less likely to be disturbed and the photo images are often fairly presentable. A digital camera is fitted to the viewing end of your telescope using one of a variety of adaptors. But when I bought my Nikon Coolpix 4500 for this purpose, I was unaware that my reliance on reading glasses would prove to be a problem.

All adverts and reviews praise this well-designed model – its split-body aids the viewing of objects at different levels and it enjoys a host of other attributes. My adaptor between camera and scope was a dedicated Swarovski cylinder which screwed on to the camera lens and secured to the scope (Swarovski 80HD) with one grub screw (other adaptors have 4 screws). This was my first setup and I had high hopes of success in the radical change from years of SLR bird photography. The camera has two viewing windows – one is a little glass at the upper edge through which you simply see the subject. This however is blocked off when you attach the scope. The other viewing window – an LCD screen in the centre, is very difficult to make out and focus when the sun is behind you. More importantly, I can't see any detail at all on it without wearing my glasses.

Imagine the photographic process in the field. A desirable subject swims into binocular view – the scope is then focused in on the target and directional knobs tightened (all without glasses). Out comes the camera (already screwed to the adaptor) and it is fitted down on to the scope eyepiece and the grub screw tightened. On go the glasses to check the focus – no bird on the screen ! Try to locate the subject by loosening off the knobs – fail! Off comes the camera & adaptor (and glasses) to find the bird again in the scope. Back on glasses and camera and check screen – tighten knobs – click! "Yes!"..... Well actually "no", because all the activity has produced a shaky hand that has blurred the shot (the addition of a remote control for my third hand is not an option).

My solution for this problem stemmed from watching a friend using a Fuji S5500 digital camera with its lens-hood attached. This model has a similar LCD screen but also, vitally, a reflex window at the upper edge through which the scene is viewed and focused and later edited – all with no glasses required! He focused his Leica scope on the bird, simply lowered the camera lens-hood down over the viewing end, tightened, refocused and took the picture. With this kind of speed, the target had a fair chance of still being there for the taking. Therefore his success rate was much higher and image much sharper than mine. It seems that the snugging down of the lens-hood over the telescope lens gives a softer contact than working with an adaptor, which reacts to the slightest shake of the whole apparatus.

Nikon with adaptor. *(Linda Baillie)*

Fuji with lenshood. *(Linda Baillie)*

The only problem was that the Fuji lens-hood had to fit over the scope accurately. With my Swarovski lens being narrower than the Leica, I had to wind adhesive tape round and round the eyepiece to achieve the right thickness. I have lately returned from on holiday where my Fuji was in constant use. Of course, I still have to discard many imperfect images but on the whole, the process is now enjoyable and reasonably successful. The image below was one of a series taken of a Wren feeding and singing among giant hogweed along a stream at Coldingham.

Jimmy Maxwell

We would welcome any other personal findings from members interested in taking images of birds and the techniques and equipment they have found successful (Eds.).

Wren. *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

NOTES & COMMENT

Sheep's wool caution

A word of caution to Margaret Cowie who supplies her garden birds with sheep's wool.

I have a male Blackbird who has reared chicks annually since 2002. I know it is the same bird because during that summer a large tuft of sheep's wool accidentally got tangled round one foot resulting in the loss of his three toes. Because of this disability he is now easily recognisable.

Margaret has obviously not had any similar problems and probably never will have, but to be safe I would suggest she separates the strands and cuts them short. The shorter strands will still be appreciated by the Blue Tits but they are less likely to become entangled around the birds' sharp claws. Sisal treated in the same way is a good alternative.

Frank Stark

Oystercatchers are also well documented for their propensity to pick up sheep's wool in their feet resulting in severe deformity and often loss of tissue (Eds.)

Our Waterston House neighbours

The SOC headquarters at Waterston House, Aberlady now features a fine large pool which is separated from the nearby Craigielaw Golf Course by a meadow, rich with poppies and oxeye daisies. After a day spent helping in the Library, I settled down to watch and photograph some of the resident birds attracted by the water. A family of Grey Partridges has been seen lately and I was lucky to catch one of the parents coming down for a drink. Apart from the Swallows flight-dipping on the surface, the main visitors were Wood Pigeons who were using the shallow slate-covered edge for bathing. At the moment, watchers only see (or photograph) these 'locals' coming down to the water when viewing through the window-glass of the Gallery – no doubt the birds will become more confident when they come to accept us also as residents.

Jimmy Maxwell

Down for a drink. *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

The positive side of farming.

Nicky Penford's excellent article on farming (*Scottish Bird News* 76: 9–11) omits to cover some of its advantages. For example, ploughing turns up a lot of food for birds such as gulls, corvids and waders, some of which feed behind the plough while others including wildfowl continue to frequent ploughed land long afterwards. This surely deserves more study to see how important it is and whether its timing is changing.

Cutting grass for silage also provides a bonanza in the form of dislodged invertebrates (and maybe Corn Bunting's nests?) for birds when there is a shortage of food for their young in dry weather, when they are otherwise liable to get killed feeding on road-kills. All the local Jackdaws recently organised a noisy creche for their newly-fledged chicks in a field just cut for silage opposite our house; I do not remember so many birds frequenting hayfields in the past. It seems time some attention was paid to the birds we have still got as well as the ones we are losing.

W.R.P. Bourne

Young Golden Eagle and lambs

I spotted the young Golden Eagle sitting on a small mound in a field of rough pasture close to the village of Ballalan. I had walked round the side of a small hill behind the bird and now, unseen, immediately dropped flat to the ground to view it. It seemed to be watching a lamb in front of it that had strayed from the other sheep and after a few minutes it took off, flying quite close to the ground, in the direction of the lamb. The adult sheep, including the intended victim's mother, I

Immature Golden Eagle. *(Frank Stark)*

presume, spotted the eagle and started to run towards the lamb. The lamb, sensing something was amiss, started to run towards its mother but before they met, the eagle swooped over the lamb, just missing it. Veering round to the left, it made another pass, but by this time, the lamb was surrounded by the adults. It still swooped at them though, but to be honest it looked more like devilment than a

Bath time. *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

Making a pass. *(Frank Stark)*

serious attempt to kill anything. However, I have no doubt whatsoever that Golden Eagles on Lewis kill live lambs. As I had never witnessed such an event myself I had remained sceptical, but a telephone call from ghille friend changed my views.

He told me he had watched an eagle grasp a lamb by the scruff of the neck and carry it about 50 yards before dropping it into the heather. He recovered the unfortunate animal which was still alive as the talons had only pierced the loose skin on the lamb's neck. I had no reason to doubt his story but it did help when two guests who were with him verified what he had told me.

Frank Stark

Caption Competition

The winning Caption from *SBN* 76 (see woodpecker photo below) came from David Jardine with "Ok, you've seen my air guitar, do you want to see my 'heidbanging'?" – Well done! Others – "Chocks away !" - Frank Stark. "Rap a Tap Tap wears the SOC Cap ?" – Jane Joy. "One of these days I'll get the hang of this drumming lark !" - John Reid.

Great spotted Woodpecker. *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

Caption competition: Grey Heron and Sand Martin. *(Stewart Love)*

Provide a caption for the Grey Heron picture above and have a chance of winning an SOC hat. Each *SBN* edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in *SBN*? Send your single caption by E-mail to jimmy.maxwell@virgin.net (or of course by mail to the SOC – see Page 3)

Willow Tit chick (inset; adult Willow Tit). *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

Unusual Willow Tit

The accompanying images feature one of a family of Willow Tits which hatched on 2nd May in a nestbox near Wishaw. They were ringed on 31st May by Iain Livingstone who found that one chick had feather quills down each leg. As this seemed highly unusual, we photographed the bird later, on 4th June. By this time, the feathers, which reached right down to the toes, were emerging. The rest of the brood of seven were quite normal and all fledged successfully around June 9th. It would be interesting to know if this has been seen before on any normally bare-legged species.

Jimmy Maxwell

British Birdwatching Fair, Rutland Water 19th–21st August 2005

For the second year running a team of SOC staff and volunteers made the 300 mile migration to Rutland Water (the UK's largest man made lake in England's smallest county) to set up SOC's stand, at Europe's biggest Birdwatching Fair. This year all profits were allocated to saving Gurney's Pittas and their forest home in South East Asia.

The British Birdwatching Fair was started some 17 years ago by Tim Appleton and Martin Davies and now attracts some 20,000 visitors over the three days it runs each August. SOC staff members Bill Gardner and Kate Walshaw took the Club's new display stands and also around 500 second hand books and Club literature to spread the word about SOC south of the Border. The volunteer team of Edmund Fellowes, Vicky and Campbell McLellan, Bobby Smith and Keith Macgregor and staff managed to sell some £1600 worth of books, recruited 8 new members and gave out about 200 new membership forms. Numerous lapsed members and many people interested in birding holidays to Scotland came on our always busy stand in Marquee No 1.

The Fair also offers excellent chances to meet up with like-minded individuals and key staff in organisations such as WWT, BTO, RSPB and the Hawk and Owl Trust and many, many others. A high proportion of the stands are conservation based, of course, along with interesting retail stands, plus an amazing number of exotic birding holiday destinations and operators. Some of these had rather stratospheric prices. What exactly all this long haul air travel does for the ozone layer I'm not quite sure, but it does seem to be real growth industry.

The Fair always has an excellent Art and Photographic marquee, which is always worth a visit. This year saw launches of attractive new art books by members Chris Rose *'In a Natural Light'* and Darren Woodhead *'From Dawn till Dusk'* both £35, and now available from SOC HQ. These were published by Ian Langford, another SOC member who was exhibiting at the show. Ian informs us that he has several other new books in the pipeline including one by Donald Watson. Watch out for their reviews in the next *SBN*.

Of course there's always the latest and greatest in new optics to tempt you with several stands offering real bargains. Kowa showed a telescope with an integrated digital camera within the body of the scope. Digiscoping and digital cameras and accessories were everywhere. Waterston House will also sell a useful range of binoculars and scopes at competitive prices later this Autumn and hopefully run a seminar or two on digiscoping.

During the weekend there were also many talks and lectures to suit every interest, as well as the hilarious "Just a Linnet" by Bill Oddie *et al.*

On the Sunday, Keith and one or two others went to see the latest birding innovation. Collins have now published

WATERSTON HOUSE
Aberlady, East Lothian
SOC
Access activities and events around Scotland to help you find out more about birds.
www.the-soc.org.uk

Kate at the SOC stand at Rutland *(Bill Gardner)*

Chris Rose signing his new book. *(Bill Gardner)*

their excellent field guide loaded on either your mobile phone or a pocket PC (MS versions only, not Palm for those that know the lingo!)

As well as images and the text of the original publication, the demonstration system, also had recordings of many of the bird calls. It even lets you log your bird sightings at the touch of a button for every location that you loaded in. All this on a cartridge just the size of first class stamp, which slots into your phone or pocket PC. And the price ? £79 (+ the cost of your phone, or pocket PC). Subsequent versions will have an optional GPS facility to let you log your position automatically. Rumour has it they will also shortly do audio recognition of bird calls! Interestingly, this was all developed in South Africa, where the software team have also produced a full guide to South African birds on the same type of device

The highlight of the weekend for the SOC team however was seeing Dumfries Branch Member Edmund Fellowes receive the first prize in the annual British Birds 'Bird Photograph of the Year'. His outstanding photograph depicted an angry Meadow Pipit mobbing a Cuckoo. We hope to publish a copy of this in our next issue of *SBN*.

Other SOC members spotted over the weekend included Frances Gatens from Gourock and Eric Middleton from Dundee in the Photo tent.

If any SOC members would like to go to the BBWF as a party group next year, HQ staff could organise all your accommodation and travel for you, perhaps as a package. If you are interested please let SOC HQ know.

Bill Gardner MBE
SOC Development Manager

BOOK REVIEWS

Everything you always wanted to know about birds ... but were too afraid to ask. Stephen Moss, Helm/RSPB pp192. Price £9.99

Don't be put off by the title; this book is better than you may think – light-hearted, with a serious content. The questions are grouped in 10 chapters with headings such as Physiology, Population, Distribution etc.. The introduction says it will appeal to intelligent, enquiring 11-year olds but its appeal is much broader. Some questions do sound like ones from that sort of age and a few others like ones from 5-year olds, but no matter. It's the answers that count and are so absorbing, often going on to answer much better questions than the initial one.

It's a book for dipping and skipping, but while at my first dip, I only meant to spend 5 minutes, half an hour very soon passed. Maybe its true role is as a bedside book, but if so, your light may stay on for quite some time. For the family of any SOC member seeking an entertaining extra Christmas present, this could be just what they need. And don't miss the story of Mrs. Thatcher on p.113!

John Law

***Birds in England**, Andy Brown and Phil Grice, 2005. T & AD Poyser, London, 694pp, ISBN 0-7136-6530-0, £40.*

If you watch birds a lot in England, or are a Poyser collector who wishes to complete the set of four 'country' books within Britain and Ireland, then this weighty tome is for you. Written by two ornithologists from English Nature and sponsored by that organisation, it encapsulates all that is known of England's avifauna. The book uses data from every available source, no mean feat these days when there is a surfeit of survey and monitoring results and other studies to draw upon. Ornithology in England has come a long, long way from my own birding days as a schoolboy in the south of England some 50 years ago and this book provides an unparalleled examination of the past and present status and distribution of every species on the English list, some 550 in all. Introductory chapters on the composition and character of the English avifauna and bird habitats precede exhaustive accounts of each species. Although the cut-off date for the species accounts was the end of 2000, a short commentary of changes up to 31st August 2004 brings the book almost up to date, further increasing the spread of records from five centuries scrutinised during its preparation. Appendices include conservation status data and population estimates and the 48 pages of references demonstrate the depth of research undertaken. The text is enhanced by a profusion of tables and figures, and illustrated with a selection of attractive vignettes by Dave Nurney. A section of 50 stunning coloured photographs shows a large variety of habitats.

Unlike Scotland, Wales and Ireland (the subjects of this book's companion volumes), England's human population is one of the densest in Europe. Despite that, it has some extremely beautiful and wild places to compensate for the intensive agriculture that covers much of the countryside. Even the cities' green spaces harbour much of interest, as has been shown by the BTO's recent London Bird Project. Many species' fortunes have been driven downwards by development and loss of habitat but, conversely, upward population trends have followed the application of serious conservation policies. The information in this book will, I am sure, be an invaluable conservation tool in the future.

The book's companion volumes (published between 1978 and 1994) were able to draw upon far fewer data than *'Birds in England'*, especially *'Birds in Scotland'*, the earliest of the three. Our own planned replacement (known currently as *BS3*), now in preparation, could learn a lot from our neighbour's latest publication, although (I'm sure they won't mind me saying this) ours will hopefully prove to be even better! I would recommend this book as a fine example of a country avifauna which, as the dedication highlights, is really a testimony to the efforts of an enormous number of committed birders recording their observations over the years – a point we could all take on board.

Norman Elkins

The Good Bird Guide *Keith Marsh, 2005. Christopher Helm, London, pbk ISBNO – 7136-6848-2 Price £16.99*

In many books on where to find birds, the sites are used primarily as the key, but in this chunky book the birds come first. Each of the 435 species classed as the most coveted comes with a sketch, a paragraph on its range, a note on sub-species if appropriate, details on habitat and finally a country-by-country list of sites, starred according to frequency of occurrence.

These areas are then expanded upon in a site gazetteer, again by country, in the second part of the book which includes a small numbered map and also advice on best centres to stay and distances to travel.

With any guide, covering as it does the Western Palearctic, there are inevitably species/areas not included, such as Red Necked Grebe at Gosford Bay and more obviously, Pink Footed Goose at Aberlady, Loch Leven and Strathbeg which surely rank as major sites in the UK.

Finally there is a useful index of sites to make it easier to plan and make up an itinerary. This without doubt ranks as one of the best bird-finding guides and for today's mobile birdwatcher, or indeed those with only pipe dreams, is an essential purchase at a very competitive price.

Keith Macgregor

Best Birdwatching Sites in the Scottish Highlands, Gordon Hamlett, 2005. Buckingham Press Ltd. ISBN 0 9533840 98. 240pp. £15.95

Living in the Highlands, I was very interested in reviewing this book, both as a local resident of a place mentioned and as one interested in day trips in the Highlands.

The introduction sets the scene; the seasons for seeing birds, the unique courtesy of driving on single track roads, being aware of the lack of many garages and comfort stops and generally helping birdwatchers to enjoy the area. I especially liked the chapter on "How to use this book". It explains that the area covered is huge, a car being essential, and that you are not guaranteed to see certain birds at specific sites. It helps you to follow the tour maps and gives information about each tour, carefully mentioning any sensitive species such as Capercaillie and Blackcock.

The actual tour chapters are very informative, well laid out and easy to follow. There are usually several different places to stop on the tour and the author goes into some detail about the area, including campsites, footpaths, history and other wildlife which may be seen.

Although Mr Hamlett tends to ignore wee villages with a shop and pub, because they lack the facilities of the bigger towns, on the whole, I liked the book. Obviously, if you are planning a trip to the Highlands, this is just a guide - you can select the places to go, in which order and for how long. He points out good places to visit, where to park and what you might find. As such, I think it is an excellent publication, perhaps designed more for the general birdwatcher rather than the serious 'ticker' who needs to see as many birds as possible on a trip. It is written with a sense of humour, which makes it all the more readable and whets the appetite for seeing more of the Highlands.

Janet Crummy

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RECENT REPORTS

A Review of summer 2005

The mid-end of June period again proved productive on Shetland with a **Paddyfield Warbler** seen at Skaw, Unst on 22nd-23rd (following on from one last June on Foula), a **Blyth's Reed Warbler** on Fair Isle on 16th-17th and an **Arctic Warbler** there on 22nd-23rd. A **Terek Sandpiper** was also seen in June on Shetland, on Fetlar during 10th-13th and then nearby at Haroldswick, Unst on 17th (fourth record for Shetland). The 'spring' migration continued into early July on Shetland with a **Pallid Swift** seen on the evening of the 3rd July at Skaw, Whalsay, associating with a Common Swift over the loch there - only the fifth record for Scotland and second for Shetland.

Despite these rarities, the totals for late spring scarcities in June/early July were comparatively low. Up to the 7th July, 16 **Red-backed Shrikes** were reported including in June several away from the Northern Isles, including a male at Quarrel Hill (Ayrshire) on 17th and a male at Ardnamurchan (Highland) on 11th. Eight **Marsh Warblers** were seen on Shetland during June with a singing bird then on Unst from 4th-9th July and there was a

Red-backed Shrike, Ayrshire *(Brian Orr)*

Rosy Starling, Angus *(Mark Caunt)*

good showing by **Turtle Doves** with 13 noted in June and July. Single male **Woodchat Shrikes** were at Raffin (Highland) on 21st-26th July and near Gelston (Dumfries & Galloway) on 22nd August and a male **Black-headed Bunting** was reported on Colonsay (Argyll) on 12th June. Up to eight **Rose-coloured Starlings** were seen, with reports in June from North-East Scotland, Bute (Clyde Islands) and Caithness and in July and Aug from Angus (2), Caithness, Outer Hebrides and Argyll. A **Red-rumped Swallow** was at Keyhead near Crimond (North-East Scotland) on 28th June – only the third record for the region after singles in 1987 and 1988.

It was a good **Quail** summer with 70+ singing birds reported in the period though presumably many more went unreported/unrecorded. Concentrations included six reported singing at Grantshouse (Borders) on 23rd June and eight near Southerness (Dumfries & Galloway) on 3rd Aug. It's also been a good summer for singing **Spotted Crakes** with birds reported from up to ten sites in June and July including the RSPB reserves at Loch of Strathbeg, Loch of Kinnordy and Vane Farm. **Corncrakes** too had a good year with an increase in calling males again in Argyll including a record 310 on Tiree. A **Common Crane** over-summered on Unst (Shetland) at Haroldswick, whilst up to three birds were seen in Caithness during July and August. A **Great White Egret** was at the East Voe of Scalloway (Shetland) on 18th June while perhaps the same two **Little Egrets** were involved in all the sightings from the 14th June onwards: at Kyle of Durness (Highland), Vane Farm RSPB (Perth & Kinross) and then Montrose Basin (Angus) in June. They were still there and at the Ythan Estuary (NES) in July and August. A juv **Spoonbill** was at the River Nith mouth (Dumfries & Galloway) on 20th Aug, surprisingly the only one reported.

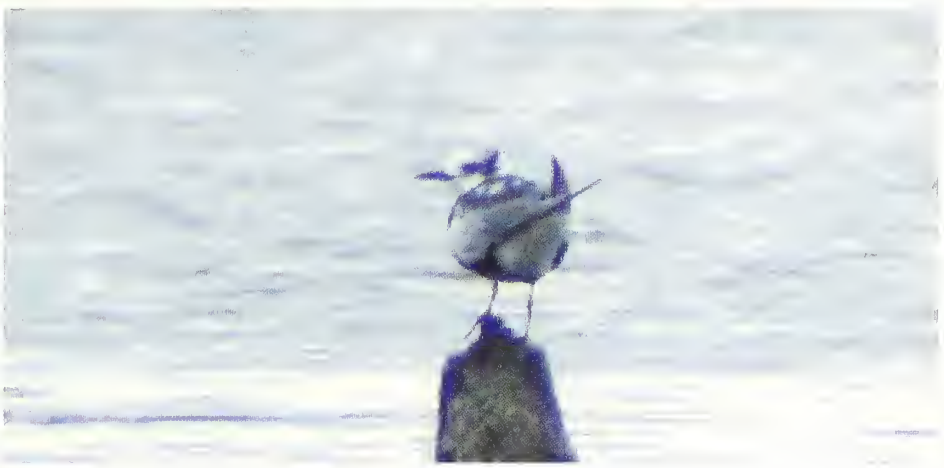
The drake **Barrow's Goldeneye** was last reported at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 16th June. Proving that it was still okay to look for rare wildfowl in the summer a drake **Lesser Scaup** was at Loch Leven (Perth & Kinross) on 3rd-4th, a drake **American Wigeon** at RSPB Loch of Kinnordy (Angus) on 13th June-18th Aug with another seen at Loch Bee, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 21st June. At least three Surf Scoters (2+ drakes and a female) were at Blackdog (NES) up to 19th July and a **Ruddy Shelduck** at Cotehill Loch (NES) on 16th July-4th Aug, with presumably the same bird then at Fife Ness (Fife) on 5th Aug. At least five drake **King Eiders** were seen, in Ayrshire still, two different at Blackdog (NES) and at least two different on Shetland.

Ruddy Shelduck, Angus *(Mark Caunt)*

An unseasonal **Rough-legged Buzzard** was at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NES) on 1st-25th June with another reported in June on Unst (Shetland) on 14th , whilst at least 14 **Hobbies** were reported, three in June, three in July and at least 8 in August. Two **Snowy Owls** remained on the Outer Hebrides, on North Uist throughout and on Lewis up to 1st July at least. A summer-plumaged **White-billed Diver** was in Holm Sound (Orkney) on 13th July-10th Aug, often showing very well by the Churchill Barriers. This bird proved a popular draw with its stay coinciding with an adult **Laughing Gull** on nearby Burray on 28th June-12th August – only the second record for Orkney. Shetland's 3rd ever **Bonaparte's Gull**, an adult, was at Veensgarth then Dale, Mainland on the evening of the 19th July, however potentially the 'rarest' gull in the period was the presumed adult **Baltic Gull** (*fuscus* Lesser Black-backed Gull) on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 2nd-3rd July. At least two 1st-summer **Ring-billed Gulls** were seen on the Outer Hebrides during June and July and in August a

moulting adult **White-winged Black Tern** was at Dun's Dish on 14th-15th – fourth record for Angus.

July and August were comparatively disappointing for scarce passage waders with in July only single reports of **Little Stint** (in Moray) and **Curlew Sandpiper** (in Lothian), with then in August an adult **Curlew Sandpiper** at Montrose Basin (Angus) on 7th and the first juveniles from the 22nd, with three birds seen in Lothian on 22nd-23rd. There was a reasonable showing by **Green Sandpiper** with c.25 seen in July and c.30 in August. A good showing by **Pectoral Sandpiper** with up to nine reported from the 10th July, with six



White-winged Black Tern, Angus *(Mark Caunt)*

White-billed Diver, Orkney *(Paul Hackett)*

Laughing Gull, Orkney *(Paul Hackett)*

of those seen in the 19th-22nd August period. The only other American waders seen by the last week of August were an adult **Lesser Yellowlegs** at the north end of Loch Bee, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 13th-21st Aug and a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 23rd Aug. In July, single **Temminck's Stints** were at Musselburgh Lagoons (Lothian) on 5th-6th and at Montrose Basin on 20th whilst also in July, up to four **Red-necked Phalaropes** were on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) between 1st-8th , with a **Grey Phalarope** seen off Strathy Point (Highland) on 10th August.

Sea-watching was very good especially in August. The highlight was a land-based sighting of a **Wilson's Petrel**, a bird that lingered for c.2 hours on the evening of 3rd Aug off the headland at Labost on west Lewis (Outer Hebrides) – only the fifth record for Scotland. Irish seawatchers in the last few years have become used to seeing small numbers of Wilson's Petrels 'from land', so they really are out there - an exciting development in Scotland. There was a good showing by **Great Shearwater** in August with four seen off the Outer Hebrides: one past Labost on 4th Aug, two off there on the 5th and one seen from a pelagic trip 4 miles west of Ardvule Point on South Uist on 14th . Also in August one was seen off Strathy Point (Highland) on 4th and 20+ were reported in the Hawes Bank area of the Minch to the north of Coll and Tiree around the 16th-18th. (This same area of the Minch had a record of 70+ Great Shearwaters on the 3rd Oct 1999).

At least 9 **Cory's Shearwaters** were reported from the 25th July including two off Labost, Lewis on 4th Aug with one seen off there on the 5th and one close inshore off Scurdie Ness (Angus) on 21st Aug. Also in July, a **Little Shearwater** flew south past Uisaed Point (Argyll) on 21st with another reported from Corsewall Point (Dumfries & Galloway) on 26th July. The first **Sooty Shearwater** of 'the season'

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Sabine's Gull, Lothian *(Mark Wilkinson)*

was one found dead on Burra (Shetland) on 26th June with then 550+ reported from 15th July including 63 past Labost, Lewis on 4th Aug and 66 past Strathy Point (Highland) on 5th Aug. Around 15 **Balearic Shearwaters** were reported from the 17th July and unusually, all bar two were seen on the east coast including seven reported off Fife Ness (Fife) between the 6th-20th August.

An adult **Long-tailed Skua** was seen off Cramond (Lothian) on 21st June with then eight others reported in July and August with 28 **Pomarine Skuas** reported from the 23rd July. Four **Sabine's Gulls** were reported between the 12th-14th Aug all from Lothian and Fife, including an adult that lingered at Seafield, Edinburgh on the 12th-14th. Seven **Black Terns** were seen in August in Lothian (3), Fife (2), NES and Renfrewshire whilst c.20 **Roseate Terns** were reported in Aug, all from the Firth of Forth, apart from singles off Uisaed Point (Argyll) on 7th and 14th and an adult at Lunan Bay (Angus) on 18th.

After last August's record showing, there was only one **Greenish Warbler** seen this year, an adult bird at Norwick, Unst (Shetland) on 13th-15th August. The first **Barred Warbler** was seen on Fair Isle on 14th August, then 12 others up to the 23rd at least, including 7 on Fair Isle on 20th with, away from Shetland, one at Rattray Head (NES) on 19th. Two **Red-backed Shrikes** were on Shetland from the 20th Aug, a **Marsh Warbler** on Fair Isle on 20th-21st Aug with two **Common Rosefinches** on there from the 18th Aug and another on Foula on the 19th. A juvenile **Common Redpoll** on Lewis at Tolsta Chaolais on 18th Aug suggests local breeding, as is presumably also the case

Reed Warbler, Clyde *(Jim Duncan)*

Black Redstart, Lothian *(Mark Wilkinson)*

with the two juvenile **Black Redstarts** at Torness (Lothian) on the 14th Aug. There appears to be only one previous confirmed successful breeding record of Black Redstart in Scotland, a brood of four reared on the Isle of May in 1994.

Angus Murray

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Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year in March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editors at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland.

www.the-soc.org.uk

***Passwords to access members' web pages:
'great' & 'skua'***